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SHAKSPEARE'S "CYMBELINE."

By D. J. SNIDER.

The relation in which this play stands to *Winter's Tale* is very intimate, and it is evident that both were constructed after one pattern. There is the same disregard of external probability, the same mingling of Pagan and Christian customs, the same defiance of the facts of History and Chronology. The main pathos in each play belongs to female characters and is the same, namely, devotion of the wife to the Family under the most trying circumstances. Yet the surroundings and incidents are quite different: Hermione is mother as well as wife, while Imogen is the young bride; the difficulties of the former come from the husband alone, the difficulties of the latter come at first from her parents and then from her husband. The structure of the two works is also similar. Both are Special Dramas in which a tragic collision finds mediation; the earnest theme is brought to a happy conclusion, and hence they cannot be classed under Tragedy or Comedy. There is also introduced an idyllic realm in distinction from the court and civilized society, which is the chief instrumentality in restoring the injured and overcoming the wrong of the State. Repentance, too, is made the spiritual ground of the reconciliation of the offenders, though it has not so complete and prominent a development in *Cymbeline* as in *Winter's Tale*. The resemblance in thought and structure is therefore very decided; still the setting of each play, the incidents and characters, are altogether different.

The entire action, accordingly, will be divided into three parts or movements. The first part portrays the world of conflict and disruption which has its centre at the court of Cymbeline. Family and State are in a condition of strife and wrong; the union of Posthumus and Imogen, representing the Family, has to endure a double collision, from within and from without; Britain, representing the State, is involved in a war with a foreign power. This part therefore exhibits struggle and contradiction on all sides; because of such a condition of things there will necessarily result a flight from

the world of institutions to a primitive life. Hence we pass to the second part, which is the idyllic realm, the land of peace and harmony, inhabited by hunters, and far removed from the conflicts of the time. But this narrow existence will disintegrate from within, and will be swallowed up in the conflict from without. The third part therefore is the Restoration, involving the repentance of those who are guilty, the return of those who have been wrongfully banished—in general, the harmony of all the collisions of Family and State.

The presupposition of the action is the love and marriage of Posthumus and Imogen. It is in the highest degree a rational union, the characters of husband and wife seem just fitted for one another. Moral worth, strong emotion, intellectual gifts, are all present. Posthumus has been instructed in every kind of knowledge; he is also endowed with the fairest exterior and noblest manners. But that which he lacks is a long line of noble ancestry, though his father and brothers had rendered the most important services to their country. In fact, his entire family had perished, directly or indirectly, in its defence, and he had been left an orphan. This, then, is the sole ground of objection to him; the play emphasizes the conflict between birth and intelligence. Imogen, the daughter of the king, has chosen him in preference to the degraded and half-witted nobleman Cloten, against the will of her father and against the plans of her step-mother. Her choice, however, meets with the secret but unanimous approval of the courtiers. Now, to break this union so true and so deep, the most powerful instrumentalities are brought forward in the course of the play. But particularly the wife Imogen is subjected to the sorest trials, and passes through them in triumph: nothing can undermine her devotion. Here we see the inherent necessity for the restoration and final union of the pair, since the Family reposing on so deep and rational a basis cannot be destroyed without violence both to thought and to our most sacred emotions.

Against the marriage of Posthumus and Imogen there is a double assault, giving what may be named the external and internal collisions. These two phases manifest all the possible forms of conflict with the Family. The first phase will exhibit the external collision, in which there is an attempt

to destroy the union of the married pair by force, by violent separation. Three persons of consequence are engaged in the undertaking, Cymbeline, the Queen, and Cloten. Cymbeline, the father of Imogen and king of the land, has fallen completely under the influence of his queen, who is his second wife. At her instigation he has forbidden the marriage of his daughter with Posthumus, and is ready to force the pair asunder. It is a phase of the Poet's frequent theme: the collision between the will of the parent and the choice of the child. The Queen, however, is the lever of the whole action, and her great object is to place her son upon the throne. She is the perfection of cunning and ambition. The easiest way of attaining her end is to marry her son Cloten to Imogen, the heiress of the throne; but, if this plan does not succeed, she is ready for the secret poisoning of all obnoxious individuals. In the use of deadly drugs she has already had some experience, and she declares that the king himself will be put out of the way, if necessary. Still Imogen understands her dissimulation, and with the greatest firmness resists all attempts to break the marriage. The Queen is therefore the villain of the play, and assails the subsisting ethical relations. Cloten her son is the type of the brutalized nobleman, indulging in every species of degrading amusement. He is the designed contrast to Posthumus in all respects; a rational union with him is impossible, at least to a woman of the character of Imogen. Braggart, overbearing, a low gamester, he yet possesses a brute courage; intellectually he is a fool. Still he aspires to the hand of Imogen and presses his suit with great pertinacity, being supported by both King and Queen. The result is, however, that he is rejected with firmness, even with insult. These are the three persons who assail the marriage; in the very beginning of the play Posthumus has to flee, being banished by the King; Imogen the wife is left alone to withstand the anger of her father, the machinations of her step-mother, and the rude courtship of Cloten. This she does in the most heroic manner, aided and comforted by a servant, Pisanio, who is the leading mediatorial character of the drama. His character is devotion to the pair, fidelity under the most trying difficulties. Forced by the stress of circumstances, he

will be faithless to everybody else in order to be faithful to his master and mistress.

With the departure of Posthumus the separation is accomplished; external force has thus disrupted the members of the Family. Still they are one in emotion, though far apart in space. Now comes the internal collision—the bond of emotion which unites husband and wife is to be assailed. This assault, if successful, must destroy the foundation of marriage, which is based upon the fidelity of each party. Let either man or wife be brought to believe that the other is untrue, the emotional unity upon which the Family reposes is destroyed. The character whose function it is to undermine their reciprocal love is Iachimo. He is incited to his act by the wager of Posthumus, who thus shows both his confidence and his folly. The scene in Philario's house at Rome, where the bet is made, is not without offensive features, but its necessity is manifest: it motives this assault upon the internal unity of the Family. The nationality of Iachimo is repeatedly emphasized; he is the crafty Italian, who utterly disregards all ethical principles. First he comes to Britain and assails the chastity of Imogen. He begins with casting suspicion upon the fidelity of Posthumus at Rome: the latter is jolly, laughs at lovers' sighs, ridicules devotion, attacks the character of woman, and, to complete his transgressions, is untrue to his marriage vow. Imogen wavers for a moment in her confidence. Iachimo thinks it is the favorable moment; he urges her to take revenge upon her husband by being untrue also, and offers himself as the means. Imogen at once detects his purpose, and is on the point of having him seized, when he succeeds in gaining her confidence a second time by an artful apology, as well as by extravagant laudation of Posthumus. The assault upon Imogen has therefore failed, her confidence in her husband is unimpaired, the wily Italian has not succeeded in destroying the union in her bosom.

Next comes the assault upon Posthumus; let us see how he stands the trial. Iachimo returns to Rome; the trick of concealment in the chest has furnished him with certain kinds of evidence which he employs to the best advantage. No doubt the chain was very strong; it convinces the impar-

tial Philario, but it ought not to have convinced a husband who was very partial towards his wife, and who firmly rested on the belief in her fidelity. But Posthumus hastily yields the wager, and concludes that his wife has lost her chastity, a conclusion of which he afterwards bitterly repents. Posthumus in his anguish turns against all womankind, and reproaches them with infidelity; he does not even spare his own mother, and thus casts the suspicion of illegitimacy upon himself. This is, however, only carrying misogyny to its necessary conclusion: a universal slander of women returns to the calumniator.

Thus Iachimo succeeds with the husband, though he failed with the wife: as regards Posthumus, the confidence upon which the Family reposes is destroyed. He is even ready to murder his wife, and gives instructions to that effect to Pisanio. But the latter again is false in order to be true; he disregards the wicked command of his master, and is faithful to the ethical relation of the pair. Imogen now leaves the court of her father and directs her journey to Milford Haven, where she hopes to see her husband. On the way, Pisanio tells her the dreadful secret: her husband has lost confidence in her fidelity. The fact is now revealed to her that their union is destroyed in the bosom of Posthumus. She too momentarily turns against the fidelity of men; her passionate utterance is, "Men's vows are women's traitors." She also begs Pisanio to execute his commission; death is preferable to the loss of union. But Pisanio has not lost confidence in the integrity of his master; and he, the skilful mediator, proposes still to save the Family, though its members despair. He tells her that she must disguise herself and take service with the Roman Lucius till she finds out the truth concerning her husband. Imogen accedes; for it is her deepest principle to maintain the union, to be true to the Family through all adversity.

Thus we behold the bond of union between Posthumus and Imogen in almost complete disruption, suspended as it were by a single thread. First, external violence separated husband and wife, Posthumus has to leave the Court, and Imogen remains behind. Then comes the internal attack which aims at undermining their emotional unity. With Imogen

it fails, but succeeds with Posthumus; and finally the wife becomes aware of the alienation of the husband. Such are what we before called the external and internal collisions against the Family. Only Imogen remains faithful to the union, though assailed from without and from within. The beauty of her character lies in this devotion to the highest principle of her sex, against parent, against the most powerful enemies, and finally against the very husband who rejects her, does she assert her unconquerable fidelity to the Family, and in the end saves it from destruction.

The second thread of this part is the conflict between the two States, though it is much less prominent than the first. Britain has ceased to pay tribute to Rome; an ambassador is sent to demand it; the refusal of Britain causes war to be declared. It is national independence against foreign subjugation. The King announces the right of revolt, and asserts the duty of maintaining the ancient laws of the land. But the chief instigator and active supporter of the rebellion is the Queen; without her strong will the weak King could not have been brought to undertake such an enterprise. It must be said that her conduct in this case is not only defensible but noble; she appears as the champion of nationality against the greatest power in the world. Even Cloten is arrayed on the same side, not from any merit in him perhaps, but through the influence of his mother. Her motive was doubtless selfish; she wanted to possess absolute authority for herself and for her son as the successor to the crown; still it is in itself a noble ambition to desire to rule over a free country. Here occurs the great jar to our ethical feeling which has always been felt in this play, notwithstanding its power and beauty. The wicked Queen, who, on the one hand, assails the Family in its loftiest and purest manifestations, on the other hand vindicates the State, the highest ethical institution of man. What, therefore, is to be her fate? She ought not to live—she ought not to die: she is a contradiction which runs through the entire play and blasts its effect. Nor can she be called a tragic character which goes down in the conflict of institutions, for her support of the State in no way necessitates her hostility to the Family. To the class of villains she rather belongs, those whose nature it

is to defy all ethical principles. We feel the discord, the double pathos of her character from this time forwards. The Poet undoubtedly seeks to condemn her as the enemy of the true marital relation; but then, on the other side, she stands the main supporter of national independence. When it is added that the drama ends with undoing the whole work of the Queen; that not only the sundered pair are restored to one another, but also Britain returns to the Roman allegiance, and thus nationality is destroyed,—we can see how deep is the violence done to the feelings of an audience, especially of a British audience. This play has never been popular, compared with most of Shakespeare's pieces, and never can be, for the reason just given. I know of no other work belonging to the Poet which shows so great a discord in the ethical world.

Such is the portraiture of the first part, the realm of conflict, from which we pass to the second part, or the idyllic land. The Poet has here introduced a new variety of inhabitants, namely, the hunters, corresponding to the shepherds of *Winter's Tale* and *As you like it*. But the transition is not so decided; this world is not marked off so plainly here as in other plays. It is mingled with foreign elements. The Poet breaks off describing it in the middle and passes to the court of Cymbeline, and he also introduces into it the Roman thread. The outlines of the Hunter-world are therefore by no means so distinct and separate in the play as might be expected from other works. Still it constitutes an essential element of the action; it performs also the function of mediation; its character too is thoroughly idyllic, and it belongs to the same species of plays as those before mentioned.

The Hunter-world is the contrast to the court, and it logically springs from the latter, which has become intolerable as the abode of man. In fact, the Poet has made it the direct product of the king's injustice. Many years before the time of the present action, Cymbeline wrongfully condemned Belarius, a nobleman who had done great services to the State; he flies from society and calls into existence this Hunter-world. But he also steals and takes along two children, sons of the king. These three persons now compose this world; the boys are grown up to manhood—are ignorant, however,

of their royal origin. The country is mountainous, their house is a cave, their clothing is made of skins, their food is derived from the chase. The old man Belarius, whom they take to be their father, is full of the praises of their wild life, and utters much detraction of the court; he has even a natural religion, the worship of the sun. But the young men are anxious to go forth and know more of life; the very dissuasion of Belarius has excited their intense desire of experience. So at the beginning we notice the seeds of dissolution in the Hunter-world.

It is manifest, therefore, that this realm is both the contrast and product of the court of Cymbeline. Belarius, driven away by injustice, has created a world of his own, or rather has returned to a primitive, natural life, as opposed to a concrete, social existence. Such ideal realms are the natural fruit of a disordered society. Suspicion, intrigue, flattery, wrong, are triumphant at court; but among the hunters are found simplicity, honesty, true bravery, united with a manly independence. It is a condition of peace; of calm, idyllic repose; a still-life, to which the individual, harassed by social collisions, gladly takes refuge, in imagination if not in reality.

Imogen, fleeing from the court, comes to its opposite, this idyllic land, and is most kindly received by its inhabitants. The inner, spontaneous feeling of kinship which springs up between her and her brothers, though wholly unknown to one another, is one of the most beautiful situations of the play; in fact, they unwittingly declare their very relationship. But the transition from a civilized state to such a rough life is a hard one; poor Imogen falls ill, and takes some of the queen's drug, whose effect, however, is merely to produce a long sleep. But the innocent hunters think that she is dead, and we have her burial ceremonies portrayed. It is the primitive view of death; a cheerful religion of nature breathes through their utterances; their love is manifested by the floral decorations supplied immediately from the soil. This is apparently the second time only that they have seen death; their supposed mother Euriphile had died before among them. Their chief rite is the song, whose theme is that death frees man from all the finite struggles of existence. The conflicts both of

Nature and of Spirit are then settled. The internal necessity of this burial scene is not apparent, inasmuch as the death of Imogen is only fictitious. But it gives fulness and beauty to the portrait of idyllic life. It shows, too, how the hate of the real world pursued Imogen to her humble place of refuge, and the striking contrast in the treatment of her by the hunters and the court.

The second arrival from abroad in this idyllic land is that of Cloten. The pursuit of Imogen has led him hither. His design is to inflict upon the poor fugitive the most brutal outrage and drag her back to her angry parents. The wretch meets the elder of the brothers, begins to treat him as if he was one of the servile courtiers, and addresses him in a most insulting manner. The work is short, Cloten's head is cut off in a trice. It was only the court and civilized society which could protect such a monster. In this realm of nature birth conveys no privilege unless supplemented by other endowments. But observe the contrast between these two adversaries: Cloten, the probable successor of the throne hitherto, is slain by the true heir, one who possesses not only the royal blood but the royal character. The Poet has taken pains to portray Guiderius, the elder of the two boys, as animated with the worthy spirit of his high lineage. The aristocracy of birth is shown on its good and bad side in these two personages, in the degraded nobleman Cloten, and in the generous and high-spirited Guiderius, whose humble life has not extinguished the spark of his royal origin.

Such is the fate of Cloten in this idyllic world. He is laid by the hunters alongside of Imogen. She wakes and sees the headless trunk with her husband's clothes on; she thinks that it is Posthumus and that he is dead. Pisanio is accused by her of treachery; the last one who was faithful seems to have turned false. It is the culmination of her trials, the object of her life is gone, the unity of marriage appears now impossible. She has endured the external and the internal disruption, and still did not despair; here is the final stroke. In a swoon, she falls upon the corpse.

The second thread is introduced also into this Hunter-land, namely, the collision between the Roman and British states. It necessarily swallows up the idyllic realm, which has al-

ways a tendency to return to society. The battle-ground is in the neighborhood of the hunters' terrain; that is, the latter cannot be wholly withdrawn from the conflict of the nation. Lucius, the Roman general, finds Imogen lying upon the supposed body of her lover; she revives and makes the best of her situation by entering his service as a page. The means of return is thus provided for her; suicide she cannot commit on account of her moral nature. But the Hunter-world dissolves now within itself. The germ of its dissolution was noticed before; the two young men are dissatisfied with their narrow sphere of action, when they have discovered that there is another world beyond, of which they know nothing. They hear the noise of the conflict round about them: the old man Belarius, with the bitter remembrance of his wrong, wishes to go higher up the mountain out of the way; he desires still to preserve his idyllic realm. But the youths cannot be restrained; their thirst for activity is so great that they have come to prefer death to their present condition. They descend therefore into the plain to participate in the struggle of nationality, and the old warrior Belarius cannot stay behind. Thus the Hunter-realm vanishes, being disrupted from within and disturbed from without. The civilized State must show itself stronger than such a narrow, abstract existence. These hunters, therefore, will also return; the Roman war is the means: they must, on the one hand, be restored to the State, and the State, on the other hand, must make it possible for them to live under its protection—must free itself from wrong and contradiction.

Next comes the third part, the Restoration, which will bring all the separated and colliding elements of Britain into harmony. The external means for accomplishing this purpose has already been stated to be the war with Rome. Connected with it in one way or another are all the characters for whom reconciliation is prepared. The battle takes place; the Romans are at first victorious, but are afterwards beaten back and defeated by the three hunters, aided by Posthumus. Thus the idyllic land has been the instrumentality of saving the king; his own courtiers and soldiers have degenerated into cowards. The indignant speech of Posthumus to a British lord shows to what pass the courage of the nation had

come under Cymbeline; the fresh, independent spirit of the mountains rescues the country. The Roman commander is taken prisoner together with Imogen; all the persons to be restored are collected in the tent of the British king.

The battle, being only an external instrumentality, is of minor importance; hence the Poet does not dwell upon it, but has it pass before our eyes rapidly in the form of pantomime. The point, however, which is of the highest significance is the internal ground for the return and salvation of the different characters. They who have done wrong can be saved only through Repentance; they must as far as possible make their deed undone. There are at least three persons who manifest contrition for their conduct: Posthumus, Iachimo, and the King. But the worst character of the play, the Queen, will not or cannot repent; at least, her repentance is of that kind which does not purchase reconciliation; for she

“ repented
The evils she hatched were not effected; so,
Despairing, died.”

Her violation of the ethical world has taken such deep possession of her nature that it could not be cast off; renunciation of ambition and crime means death.

The chief of the repentants is Posthumus. He supposes that his order to kill Imogen has been fulfilled by Pisanio; he is full of the deepest tribulation for his hasty action. Though he is not yet aware of the innocence of Imogen, he nevertheless repents of his command; for thus she has not had the opportunity to repent. He courts death; he would gladly offer up his own life as an atonement for his deed. Repentance can go no further. When the individual is ready to sacrifice his existence, what more can he give? Posthumus seeks death from both Romans and Britons; but his wish is not fulfilled, he still lives. It is evident that he has made his deed undone as far as lies in his power; the sorrow within and the action without indicate the deepest repentance. In two lengthy speeches, he is introduced as giving expression to his contrite feelings. Reconciliation must be prepared for such a soul, it is a necessary logical consequence.

Here the Poet might stop, for he has amply motived the reunion of Posthumus with Imogen which will hereafter take place. But he has chosen to go further, and to give a detailed representation of the above-mentioned reconciliation, to present a literal image of the repentant soul harmonizing itself with the rational principle of the Universe. Posthumus falls asleep and dreams; his dream is of forgiveness. He sees his father, mother and brothers interceding for him with Jupiter, greatest of the gods, who grants their prayer. The restoration to Imogen is promised and also release from affliction. It is but a dream, yet it shows his state of mind and intimates his internal absolution. He wakes again, doubt and sorrow assail him, again he sighs for death. But the reality soon comes to confirm the vision, he is reconciled with his father-in-law Cymbeline and restored to his wife Imogen.

This passage, including the dream of Posthumus and his conversation with the jailers, has often been condemned for its manifold defects, and sometimes declared not to be the work of the Poet. That its literary merit falls below the average literary merit of Shakespearian composition is hardly to be denied. That it is not strictly necessary to the development of the action is also true, since the repentance already manifested by Posthumus logically involves restoration. The example of the Poet may be also cited, for, though he has often employed Repentance in other dramas, he has nowhere introduced such an intercession of divinity to secure its results. Still, even if it is not absolutely requisite for the action, the plea may be made in its favor that it gives an imaginative completeness to the mediation. Deity is introduced in person, manifesting grace for repentance. It is thus the most profound Christian doctrine in a heathen dress, and this dress is taken instead of the real Christian dress for the purpose of avoiding the charge of blasphemy. To bring God upon the stage pardoning the repentant sinner would be a pretty hazardous undertaking. Such a liberty may be taken with an old, worn-out Greek divinity, though even this procedure is not strictly that of the drama, which should exhibit man as determined from within and not from without. But the introduction of the tablet, with its pro-

phetic inscription and its interpretation, is not only useless but also ridiculous. The authorship of the entire passage, however, cannot well be taken away from Shakespeare in the absence of positive testimony, though one may wish it were not his. It is also jointed too closely with the rest of the Act to pass for an external interpolation.

The second of these repentants is Iachimo, who has been guilty of defaming a pure woman, and destroying the internal bond of union of the Family. He also has come with the Roman army; his first declaration is sorrow for his wrong. The main ground of his change seems to lie in the fact that he has lost his former valor; the guilty soul paralyzes the strong arm; he is vanquished by one who seems to him to be a mere peasant. Before the king and the entire company he confesses his deed, and finally asks for death at the hands of Posthumus, whom he has so deeply wronged. Thus his repentance has carried him to the point of a necessary reconciliation; he has offered for it the highest possible price, namely, his own life. At this price it cannot be withheld, for how could his punishment obtain more? The character of Iachimo as well as that of Posthumus is not tragic; their complete repentance, going so far as to make a voluntary sacrifice of their own existence for their wrongs, forestalls the tragic end, since the latter at most could exhibit their lives taken for their guilt. Repentance is the mind's sacrifice; it is the individual sitting in judgment upon his own act, and condemning himself, even to death. Such a decision, however, should not destroy the rigid and upright judge who makes it. But a system of external justice can by no means be regulated by this purely internal element.

The king also repents of his conduct toward Imogen, and is reconciled with Belarius. Thus his two great acts of wrong are undone; the two deeds which disrupted his family—one of them causing the loss of his sons, the other the loss of his daughter, are recalled. The result is, sons and daughters are restored to him, and his family is once more united. But not only this, but also the State is restored from its internal diremption. The Hunter-world is reconciled with it, and no longer separates from it, creating a distinct realm. Even in

the external conflict, Britain is successful against the Romans; but the king voluntarily surrenders his victory and again becomes the vassal of Rome. The object is, no doubt, to undo entirely the work of the wicked Queen, who was the chief instigator of the revolt, even to the extent of throwing away national independence. I have already said that to make this detestable woman the heroine of her country's freedom was a jar to our ethical feeling; but to reject that freedom because it was achieved by a wicked person, seems to grate even more harshly upon the sentiment of nationality. The management of the part of the Queen I have before stated to be, in my judgment, the chief defect of the work.

The critics have not been very satisfactory in their views of this play. To determine its true nature has evidently given them great difficulty, and as a consequence they have employed to designate it certain high-sounding phrases, which, however, add very little to our knowledge. It has been called a dramatic novel, mainly on account of the loose connection and the number of its incidents and characters; it has also been called a dramatic epic, chiefly because of the introduction of Jupiter in the last Act. The idyllic element, too, has been declared to be foreign to the action and unusual in the drama. In general, this play is considered peculiar in its kind among the works of Shakespeare. But the Poet has elsewhere frequently employed epical elements, and to say that *Cymbeline* is the most loosely connected and the most varied of all his dramas is a hazardous statement. If the preceding analysis has been successful, it has shown that the drama before us has the same unity, the same fundamental thought, and the same essential structure, as the other Special Dramas of Shakespeare. If the reader will now compare the present with the four preceding critiques in this journal, he will find at bottom the same general movement in all of them, and will have revealed to himself one of the deepest principles of Shakespearian art.
